



Opening Statement on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) at the First Session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop a legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment

Punta del Este, Uruguay (27 November 2022)

The invention of plastics, a relatively inexpensive, durable product, improve our quality of life, revolutionized industries, and made healthcare safer and more affordable.

However, as production has exploded, we have failed to utilize plastics sustainably, resulting in an exponential increase in plastic pollution causing detrimental impacts to our ecosystems and societies.

As has been mentioned many times since Nairobi, we have no time to waste. We must negotiate this new instrument swiftly because the negative impacts of plastic pollution, particularly in the marine environment, are already being felt.

Small island developing States are disproportionately impacted by yet another transboundary environmental problem that we did not cause. This pollution mostly originates thousands of kilometres from our shores and is carried to our countries by atmospheric and oceanic currents. Our identity, livelihoods and future are intrinsically tied to the ocean.

Plastics are toxifying the marine food chains that we rely on for nutrition and food security. Science now tells us that microplastics have been found in our blood and can cross into the brain. Plastics are also choking and killing marine biodiversity, including coral reefs and mangroves. These ecosystems provide essential services such as fisheries and tourism, accounting for a significant portion of GDP in SIDS.

Plastic pollution exacerbates not only the cause but the negative impacts of climate change. It reduces the ability of the ocean to absorb and sequester carbon dioxide. As well, as plastics break down, they emit GHG into the atmosphere. And most troubling, plastic production and incineration is projected to emit 2.8 gigatons of carbon dioxide per year by 2050. All of this brings us even closer to the dangerous tipping point of 1.5°C, where life on small islands becomes not only very difficult, but in some cases impossible.

This highlights something that the SIDS have been saying for a while. We must be urgent in our development of this new agreement, but we also must be equitable. We must recognize the special circumstances of SIDS and the special needs of other developing countries in this agreement. We must both ensure that the particularly vulnerable are protected, and that they have the capacity to contribute to this agreement's implementation.

In the spirit of wasting no time, let me get straight to the point: we need a creative international instrument that deals effectively with the complexity of the plastic pollution crisis, especially in the marine environment. A crisis that is environmental, economic and social. With solutions to the problem that are not always under the jurisdiction of national governments. Our old models of international agreements are likely not up to the task of solving this crisis. We must learn from what has not worked in the past.

The objectives of this agreement need to be designed to allow for equity, effectiveness, flexibility, and progression. It must reduce and control the leakage of waste plastic and microplastics into our environment through interventions across the plastics lifecycle. As well, recognizing that there are decades of plastic that are already in our environment, it must prioritize urgently eliminating existing plastic pollution especially in the marine environment.

Therefore, the full life-cycle of plastics needs to be considered within its scope, with a view to promoting resource-efficient circular economy approaches, with a priority focus on addressing single-use plastics. It should take a central place in the international efforts, while facilitating cooperation, coordination and complementarity among relevant regional and international conventions and instruments.

The ILBI should promote the development, dissemination, and incorporation of technology, science, data and information on plastics; and incorporate relevant traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples, and local knowledge systems, including from local communities, in a rights-based manner. Research and development should also be forward looking, seeking alternatives to plastic as well as more sustainable plastic substitutes for future production.

For SIDS, this agreement and the accompanying means of implementation will be essential to promote and implement environmentally sound waste management in our countries. We are all at different starting points, and the provision of grant and concessional resources are necessary to ensure that we can work towards achieving any of its collective goals and our respective obligations. Finance, capacity building and technology development and transfer must be new, additional, adequate, and predictable, with specific provisions for SIDS and LDCs, including priority efficient access and allocation of resources.

Flexibility in the implementation of obligations, commitments, or contributions, taking into account national circumstances and respective capabilities, is an absolute necessity. In line with established practice under existing instruments, we believe SIDS and LDCs warrant explicit flexibilities in the relevant contexts.

The potential elements within the Secretariat's eight broad headings are a good, non-exhaustive, starting point. But we must be flexible to supplement those when needed based on further discussions at the INC.

At a minimum, this session must do three things:

1. First, comprehensively consider the objectives and scope of the instrument, in order that it is urgent, effective, equitable and address the full lifecycle and health impacts of plastics.
2. Second, start defining the key terms and concepts, recognizing that this will be work that will continue at later INCs.
3. And third, develop a clear roadmap for our work ahead, including the potential structure of the treaty, our programme of work including intersessional work and potential working groups. As we have mentioned before, we must be evolutionary in our structure for this agreement.

Moreover, non-state actors are critical in confronting this global crisis. Multi-stakeholder engagement must be maintained and prioritized throughout the development this agreement. They should be ensured there will be opportunities to meaningfully contribute to the INC process, including on their essential role in the implementation of the agreement. The private and informal sectors, and NGOs in particular, should be engaged in relation to innovative financing, technology development and transfer, and facilitating the implementation of obligations, actions and measures.

We have set crucial ambitious timelines to conclude our work. The time allocated for these meetings should be utilized as effectively and efficiently as possible, while considering the needs of small delegations. We

must all be flexible to overcome our differences and work in solidarity to ensure that process does not delay progress.

A failure to urgently conclude an ambitious, effective, and equitable instrument will continue the devastating and irreversible negative impacts on the SIDS Ecosystems and food chains will continue to be destroyed, thus compromising livelihoods and human health. The stakes are higher than they have ever been before, and urgent global action is required immediately before it is too late.